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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000487

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EAP/RSP; NSC FOR E.PHU

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS -- COURT RULING CHANGES
CAMPAIGN DYNAMIC

REF: A. JAKARTA 02350

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 463 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: A recent Constitutional Court ruling allows Indonesian voters--not political parties--to directly choose their representatives in the April 9 national legislative elections. This has significantly changed the dynamic of the campaign. Party elites contesting the election are no longer guaranteed seats--nor can they dictate who will get seats. Moreover, candidates running for the same party in the same region are suddenly pitted against each other, sparking intra-party conflicts. Even as most parties struggle, some--such as the President's Partai Demokrat--seem to be benefiting from the new electoral landscape. END SUMMARY.

COURT RULING ALTERS DYNAMIC

[1](#)2. (SBU) A court ruling has changed the dynamic of Indonesia's legislative elections. This ruling, rendered on December 23 by the Constitutional Court, changed the way Indonesians vote for legislative candidates, causing a sharp shift from party-centered to personality-centered politics.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Previously, political parties had long lists of candidates. At the top of the list were the party elite, influential, wealthy, entrenched, etc. If the party won three seats in a particular region, the seats would--except on rare occasions--go to its top three candidates. Those at the middle or bottom of the list stood little to no chance of getting elected. Now, politicians wanting a seat in Parliament have to get a majority of votes in their electoral districts--so in theory, anyone can win with or without party support.

THE NEW POLITICS IN ACTION

[1](#)4. (SBU) Candidates' strategies have changed dramatically as a result. Many contacts say they feel "energized"--since now they have a chance to win no matter what their rank is on party lists. Nonetheless, in order to win, the voters have to know who the candidates' are. A mass exodus from Jakarta has ensued as candidates scramble to get out to their constituencies and meet the people (as opposed to hanging around party headquarters).

[1](#)5. (SBU) An example of the changing environment: in the past, parties and candidates jointly provided social programs such as mobile medical units or agricultural development to drum up support. Now candidates are abandoning these programs for straightforward sound-bite strategies aimed at getting voters to remember their name and number when looking at Indonesia's complicated electoral ballot. Some run training sessions showing voters how to quickly find their

names on the ballots. One Golkar contact released a music cd with his name flagged in the lyrics.

¶6. (SBU) Many candidates are struggling to adjust to the new system. Those not originally from their districts, or who rarely visit, are finding it particularly challenging.

¶7. (SBU) Party dynamics are also profoundly affected by this change. Parties are now more reliant on their candidates' popularity in order to win seats. They are thus more likely to recruit movie stars and other famous people as party members and candidates in the future (the candidate lists had already been put together by the time of the court's ruling, so this phenomenon is not yet a factor in this race). Meanwhile, more qualified candidates with less star power might get lost in the shuffle. Finally, candidates have fewer motivations to donate generously to their parties as they increasingly keep the funding for themselves.

IMPACT ON THE HORSE RACE

¶8. (C) Some parties seem to be in better position than others given the change in dynamics. President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat (PD)--which had already implemented the practice of "the seat goes to the candidate with the most votes" before the court ruling--is said to be doing well in the new environment. This is also true of the Islamic-oriented National Mandate Party (PAN). To reduce intra-party competition, for example, these parties divided up electoral districts by candidate. They also asked their candidates to campaign door-to-door only in their allotted parts of each region.

JAKARTA 00000487 002 OF 002

¶9. (C) Most of the other parties, however, are faced with fierce competition which has suddenly arisen among fellow party candidates. This has increased tensions and the potential for rifts. Contacts have told us that this intra-party tension is impacting two of the largest parties, Golkar and the Indonesian Party of Democratic Struggle (PDI-P), for example. In addition, contacts have told us that PDI-P is in some trouble because of all the parties it is most known for recruiting candidates to run in different regions than their home areas. As noted, this tactic is problematic now because these imported candidates are having to campaign hard in regions that they may be unfamiliar with.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS

¶10. (C) Many observers hope that the change to an open election system, with legislative seats going directly to candidates who win the majority of votes, will lead to better public representation as candidates are forced to pay closer attention to constituent needs. Others are concerned that it has created new possibilities for money politics, weakened the party system, and reduced opportunities for women (the Court ruling effectively torpedoed a plan to increase the number of women holding seats in Parliament--see reftel). With broader ramifications unclear at this point, the general feeling is that the situation will have to shake down some more in order for longer term assessments to be made.

HUME